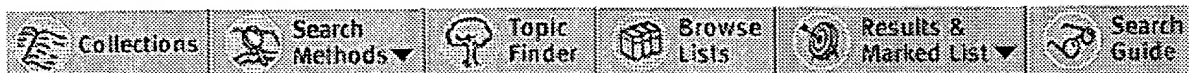


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San Francisco Chronicle

Games People Play / Finding bridge, chess and checkers opponents on the Net is now a snap

San Francisco Chronicle; San Francisco, Calif.; Mar 27, 1997; LAURA EVENSON, Chronicle Staff Writer;

Sub Title: [FINAL Edition]**Start Page:** E, 1:2**Subject Terms:** Web sitesInteractive mediaComputer & video gamesGamesCOMPUTERSTOYSENTERTAINMENT & LEISURE - ALL**Abstract:**

In the past people could play games online on sites dedicated to specific games ranging from casino to sports trivia, but those sites offered little interactivity or required a connection to a major commercial online service such as America Online.

Hard-core electronic gamers have had a few more options. They can pay to play on networking services, such as Total Entertainment Network, that match them with other players. Or they can hook up with players for free through Web sites hosted by networking services such as Mplayer at www.mplayer.com or by game makers, such as Blizzard Entertainment's new battle.net site at www.blizzard.com. and Westwood Studios' site at www.westwood.com. But such gaming sites typically require players to own a CD-ROM version of the game costing \$50 to \$70, or spend as long as five hours downloading limited shareware versions.

"The social component is what makes online gaming fun," said Steve Murch, product manager for Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. Social games online "are like living soap operas," added Chris Holden, chief executive of Kesmai Corp., a Charlottesville, Va., company that develops online games. "We provide the sets, the props and the story lines. The customer generates the content and helps develop social communities built around the games." Here's a look at a few of the most accessible sites. Let the games begin.

Full Text:

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Those twitchy fingered kids hogging the home computer to play online splatterfests like "Duke Nukem 3D" had better move over. They're about to face new competition for log-on time – from the rest of us.

Games that people play in the real world, including Hot Potato, chess and poker, have been transferred to the virtual world thanks to several new and expanded World Wide Web sites that look like game emporiums.

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With the new Web game emporiums players don't need to be joystick jocks, and downloads typically take less than a half hour. All they need is an Internet connection and a Web browser such as Netscape or Microsoft Explorer. The rest is free.

Web-site developers realize that traditional board and parlor games, including bridge and chess, still appeal to a broad audience.

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– **Netplay:** www.netplay.com – This site portends the future of online gaming with Trivia Challenge, a game that plays like a TV quiz show where players race the clock to answer questions in 28 categories. Sample: What was the first video to play on MTV? Answer: "Video Killed the Radio Star."

Free play is limited to three hours a month on this site, which is still testing for bugs before full-blown service begins next month. Gamers who log onto the site with a modem speed of 28.8 bits per second can expect a download time of about an hour. Games include Hot Potato, Poker, Crazy 8s, a solitaire card game called Patience, or HexaGone, a single-player arcade-style game where players try to shoot out tiles using a laser ball. Players who don't like to wait can order online or by phone a CD-ROM of the site's software for \$20, a fee that includes six months unlimited playing time.

– **Aries Online Games:** www.kesmai.com – Free play here is limited to games still in testing, such as Air Warrior II and Casino Blackjack. The game play is high-quality. Download times are 10 to 15 minutes for Blackjack with a 28.8 bps modem. But set aside an hour and a half to download Air Warrior. To get the full Aries experience, gamers must sign onto a commercial online service. On America Online the keyword is Aries. At CompuServe, type "games" at the "Go" prompt.

– **PlaySite:** www.playsite.com/mainsite – A friendly and painless way for players to quickly click in and play chess, checkers, backgammon and Reversi while conversing with their newfound partners via text chat. The only drawback is that there's no arguing with the sometimes idiosyncratic rules of the electronic game monitors. For example, if checkers players can jump an opponent's piece, they have to do so, according to the official rules.

For those bored by board games, the site offers a few twists on old gaming concepts. As many as seven players can join "Blitz Concentration," which requires concentration, trivia knowledge and speed to match images while the clock counts down. Socks the cat, for example, would be a match with the White House. A nice feature of the

site, "Find User," allows players to locate pals on the site, create private chat rooms and resize objects as needed.

– Internet Gaming Zone: www.zone.com – Microsoft has souped up its game site, allowing players to log on and immediately find online partners to play bridge, chess, backgammon and electronic games such as Microsoft Golf 3.0. Gamers can always scout for road-kill in a racing game called Monster Truck Madness.

Although it takes a half-hour to download and install the Zone, an easy-to-navigate game "village" makes it easy to click into game areas. Once there, players can chat to find a partner or claim a seat at a game table to start. They can also send private messages to friends on the service, and even e-mail desktop game icons called "shortcuts" to friends that will help their buddies go straight to the game with a single mouse click.

This summer, Microsoft will start charging daily and monthly fees for "premium services" such as the chance to engage in air dogfights online with more than 100 people through its Fighter Ace game. It will also sell tickets to those who want to play a round of golf against pros such as Arnold Palmer. And while the service will match players for cyberversions of traditional board games including Monopoly, Scrabble, Risk and Battleship, gamers will have to supply their own CD-ROM versions of those games to play.

– The Station: www.sony.com – Couch potatoes will merge with mouse potatoes thanks to sites like this one. Currently, players can play Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune against the machine to see if they can beat the scores of other players who log onto the site. Eventually, Sony will enable gamers to compete directly with each other in real time.

Next month, gamers can log on to Battleground, a futuristic tank war game that will involve as many as 1,000 players at a time. While game play is fast and fun once a player gets in, the site has been difficult to access.

[Illustration]

PHOTO (3); Caption: (1) Aries Online's Air Warrior II is a high-quality game but can take 1 1/2 hours to download, (2-3) The Netplay site (above) resembles a trivia challenge game that plays like a TV quiz show, while PlaySite offers an easy way for players to click in and play traditional games like chess

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